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SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

WATER

Matters

Spring 2008

Revitalizing the *River of Grass*



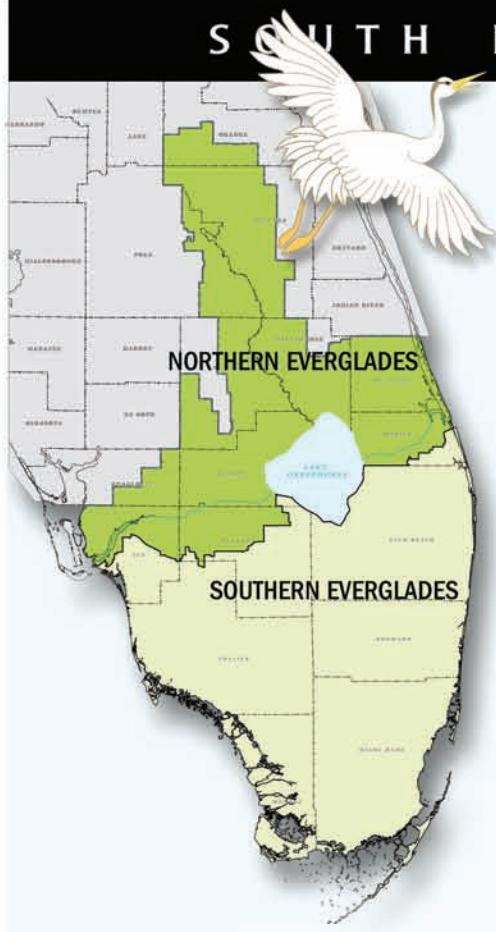
“There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth; remote, never wholly known. Nothing anywhere else is like them.”

– Marjory Stoneman Douglas (1890-1998), *The Everglades: River of Grass*, 1947

GET TO KNOW US!

Stay informed with this timely update from the South Florida Water Management District, protector of the region's water resources.





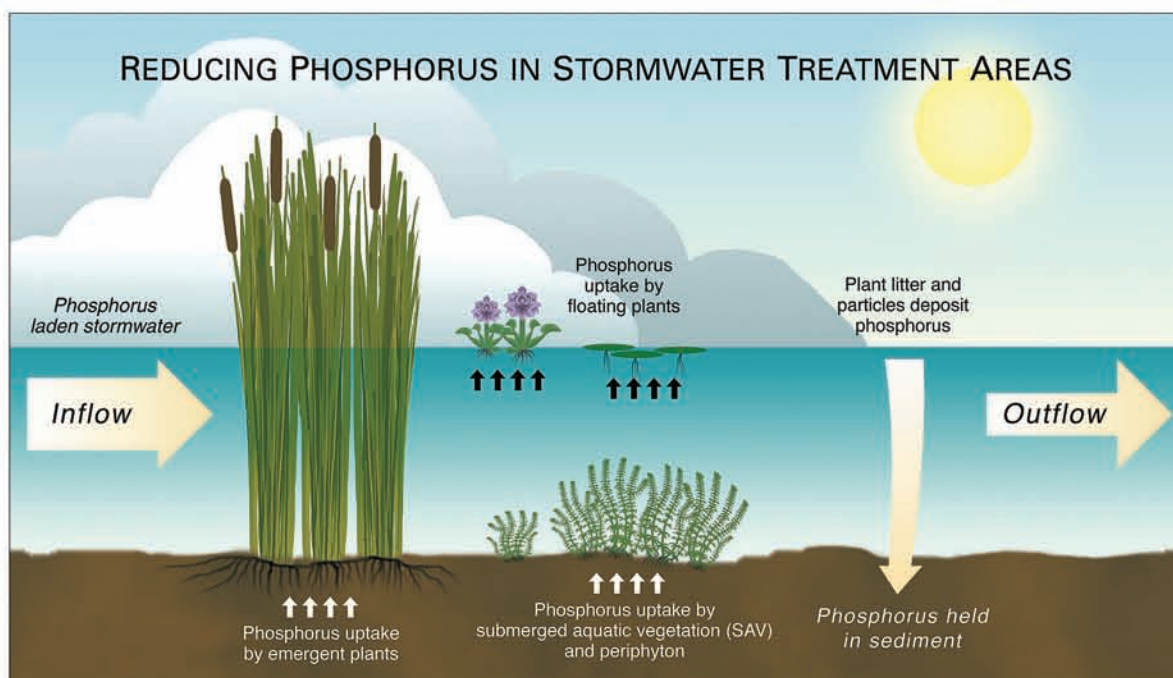
Cleaner Water *for the* Everglades

A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS

America's Everglades was once a vibrant, free-flowing "river of grass," extending from the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes near Orlando all the way to the southernmost tip of the peninsula at Florida Bay. Today, our regional system of drainage canals provides flood control and allows a population of 7.5 million to live, work and farm in areas that were once part of this greater Everglades ecosystem – now about half its original size. Stormwater from rainfall can drain across properties, collecting pollutants that eventually flow into the ecosystem's wetlands, lakes, rivers and estuaries. These pollutants, primarily the nutrient phosphorus – an ingredient in fertilizers – deteriorate water quality and upset the natural, low-nutrient level of the Everglades system. Achieving Everglades restoration will require a significant reduction in the amount of phosphorus in stormwater. Work and progress are well under way doing just that. In fact, the state of Florida has already invested nearly \$2 billion in Everglades water quality improvements alone. Below is a snapshot of major water quality improvement successes and ongoing work.

STORMWATER TREATMENT AREAS

Today, more than 52,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee have been converted to six constructed wetlands whose plants absorb the nutrients so cleaner water flows into the Everglades. One of them, at almost 17,000 acres, is the largest constructed wetland in the world. These giant stormwater treatment areas – along with agricultural practices that improve the quality of water running off fields – have prevented nearly 2,700 tons of phosphorus from entering the Everglades, including the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park. The state of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District have invested \$1.8 billion toward these Everglades water quality improvement efforts.



EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS AT STAs

By careful design, stormwater treatment areas (STAs) mimic the natural wetlands that once stretched across South Florida. The resemblance is so close that many native species of animal and plant life are making their home in these constructed wetlands. STAs remove phosphorus from water by channeling it through shallow marshes filled with aquatic plants that uptake or absorb the phosphorus. The marsh environment also attracts wading birds, ducks, turtles, fish, alligators and other native wildlife, making it ideal for recreational opportunities. Public use areas at some of the STAs offer many ways to explore the outdoors including birding, hiking, cycling, canoeing, fishing and water fowl hunting.

LOCAL WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

In partnership with local governments, the South Florida Water Management District has funded or cost-shared \$61 million toward 72 projects this year to improve the quality of water entering our lakes, canals, rivers, estuaries and bays from urban areas. Some examples include neighborhood stormwater improvements, sediment removal, filter marshes, canal dredging and septic tank replacement.



NORTHERN EVERGLADES

Underscoring the state's commitment to greater Everglades ecosystem restoration, the Florida Legislature in 2007 expanded the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act to include protection and restoration of the Lake Okeechobee watershed and the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries. The Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program recognizes the importance and connectivity of the entire Everglades ecosystem. Florida will set aside land, construct treatment wetlands and identify the water storage areas needed to improve the quality, timing and distribution of water in the natural system. The state has already committed \$250 million to the Northern Everglades initiative, with a commitment of \$100 million for future years.



SOUTHERN EVERGLADES

In addition to the \$1.8 billion in Everglades water quality improvements, the state and the South Florida Water Management District have appropriated \$2.4 billion to improve the natural flow, distribution and quality of water through the state-federal Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. A number of initiatives and construction projects are now under way, including massive reservoirs, water preserve areas and stormwater treatment areas. To date, 57 percent or 221,658 acres of lands needed to implement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan have been acquired.

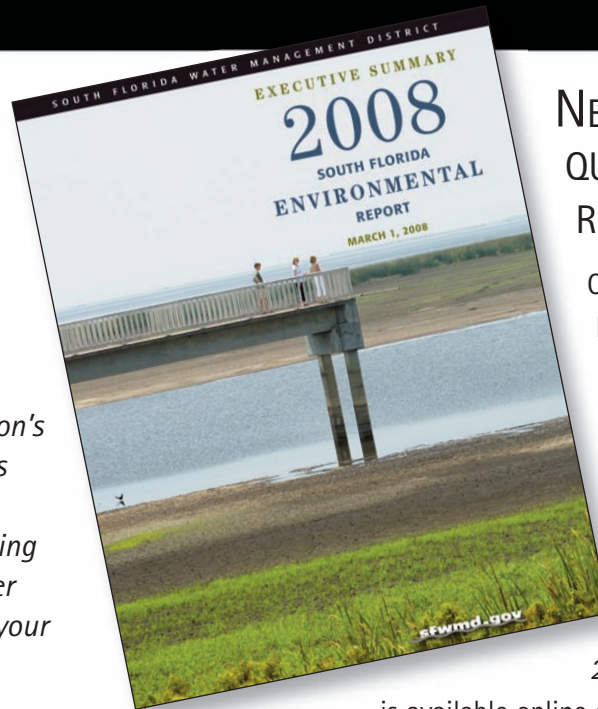


For more information, visit sfwmd.gov

What YOU can do to HELP keep our waterways CLEAN

Think about how many people live in South Florida and the household habits that may contribute pollution to the region's stormwater. What do you think rainwater collects as it rolls across lawns, parking lots and roads before draining into stormwater systems like swales, ponds, lakes or canals? Living close to the Everglades requires everyone to be a wise water resource manager. Here are just a few easy tips to help do your part to help protect water quality:

- Reduce the use of fertilizers. Apply fertilizers properly, only in amounts needed.
- When choosing a fertilizer, select one that contains 2% or less phosphorus.
- Use compost as an alternative to fertilizer.
- Choose vegetation that is resistant to pests.
- Use groundcovers or mulch to eliminate bare ground.
- Do not water or irrigate paved areas.
- Maintain your septic systems.
- Reduce or eliminate use of hazardous chemicals. Use safe alternatives.



NEW REPORT DETAILS WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT, RESTORATION PROGRESS

On March 1, the South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection released a comprehensive update detailing a year of scientific, engineering and restoration work to improve the environmental quality of America's Everglades and the entire South Florida ecosystem. The 2008 South Florida Environmental Report is available online at www.sfwmd.gov/sfer

Water Restrictions Remain in Effect

Rainfall in 2006 and 2007 was more than 20 inches below normal. This year, the rainfall we've received is not enough to restore the impact of our cumulative rainfall deficits – no matter how full a canal or lake may appear as a result of spring rains. Because rainfall is our primary source of drinking water, mandatory water use restrictions remain in effect throughout South Florida. For specific water restrictions in your area and other helpful water conservation tips, visit www.savewaterfl.com or call our Water Shortage Hotline at (800) 662-8876.



Service Centers: Your Direct Link

The South Florida Water Management District's nine Service Centers are the critical links between the regional agency – headquartered in West Palm Beach – and the local communities we serve throughout our 16-county jurisdiction.

HEADQUARTERS

- West Palm Beach
(561) 686-8800 or
(800) 432-2045 (Florida Only)

SERVICE CENTERS

- Big Cypress Basin/Naples
(239) 263-7615
- Broward
(954) 713-3200
- Florida Keys (Plantation Key)
(305) 853-3219 or (800) 464-5067
- Lower West Coast (office in Fort Myers)
(239) 338-2929 or (800) 248-1201
- Martin/St. Lucie
(772) 223-2600 or (800) 250-4100
- Miami-Dade
(305) 377-7274 or (800) 250-4300
- Okeechobee
(863) 462-5260 or (800) 250-4200
- Orlando
(407) 858-6100 or (800) 250-4250
- Palm Beach County
(561) 682-2283



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